

Dating the Gospels and Revelation

You probably do not spend sleepless nights worrying about in which decade Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their gospel records and Revelation. Neither did you get very excited in classes when you, or whoever was teaching it, spent some time trying to determine the date of the particular book being studied. So the reading of the title above did not give you an adrenalin rush. In spite of all that, I would like to present some thoughts concerning the dating of these writings which add exciting enlightenment to our understanding of the new covenant writings. So, please stay with me.

Why is the dating of those records important? If those men wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem and the system related to it, it means that the prophecies of Jesus and the apostles concerning the imminent return of the Lord, especially in the Olivet discourse and Revelation, were yet to be fulfilled and his promise to return in their lifetime failed. On the other hand, if those men wrote before 70 AD, we can be confident that Jesus' promises were true, being fulfilled in the catastrophic destruction of their system by the Roman army in the events surrounding 70 AD.

A number of conservative scholars have suggested these dates for the writing of the gospels: Mark – 65; Luke – 80-85; Matthew – 85-90; and John – 90-100, with Revelation – 96. Much of the evidence for these dates is gained from post-apostolic writers. Please bear with my audacity in challenging the conclusions of these respected scholars. Many other scholars correctly date them all before 70 AD based on internal evidence.

The Bible deals with redemptive history and touches on world history only incidentally. Most of the old covenant records relate to God's developing a chosen people of Abraham and his descendants, particularly the children of Israel. God gave that nation a land and made Jerusalem its center of worship. He gave them a Law with its priesthood and a Temple where his Presence met with his people. Jewish identity as God's people was closely associated with their capital, Jerusalem. However, at the time of Jesus' birth and ministry, they were in subjection to Rome because of Israel's lack of fidelity.

Other predictions by Jesus preceded the woes he pronounced against his people. In deep grief, he lamented, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate”* (Matt. 23:37-39). He connected that with his *parousia* -- his coming. On viewing the buildings of the temple as he was leaving it, he declared, *“Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down”* (24:2).

Then *“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming (parousia) and the end of the age?’”* To Peter, James, John, and Andrew, Jesus then began to tell them of the things that would transpire in fulfilling his previous words. Mark and Luke verify that his words were about Jerusalem (Mark 13; Luke 21). Jesus told them (not us!) how to recognize the imminence of his coming adding, *“So also, when you (not they! ch) see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place”* (24:33-34).

If all those things had happened before Matthew recorded this, we would expect him to add some informative comment like: “Jesus’ words were fulfilled even as he said. There was great unrest which finally brought rebellion against Rome. All this time the gospel was being spread among the Gentiles. The emperor called parts of his army from different places to assemble at Megiddo. Then they surrounded and laid siege on the city. But most disciples had escaped because of Jesus’ forewarning. For three years the Roman army brought all sorts of atrocities against the Jews, starving and slaughtering the people by the thousands. Even Jews turned against Jews. Of the terrible things that have happened to our people, this was by far the most horrible. The temple was desecrated and its treasures plundered. It was torn down stone by stone. The priests and ruling officials were deposed and killed. Nothing was left of our city, the priesthood, and our temple. All of this happened in our lifetime just as Jesus had warned us. Our kingdom, nation, city, temple, priesthood, and religion are beyond reclamation.”

If Matthew wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and made no mention of it after recording the prophecies of Jesus, he would lose his credibility as a recorder of the life and teachings of Jesus. What other conclusion can we reach?

The same conclusion would be justified regarding Mark, Luke, Peter, and John if they wrote after the destruction. That destruction and desolation was a matter of historical record. There is not a hint in their writings that their whole system had been obliterated! Then, how could we possibly conclude that they were writing after 70 AD?

They never became a nation again – until 1948 with the formation of the Israeli state which is by no means a restoration of their nation.

It is argued that silence cannot be used as proof -- that their failure to mention the destruction of their nation, city, temple, etc. is not proof that they wrote before those things happened. I would agree that their failure to mention China is no proof that China did not exist at that time. Nothing in Bible history or of which they wrote had anything to do with China. But everything in Bible history and of which they wrote focused on their nation, Jerusalem, their system of worship which was centered at the temple, and their priesthood. Their lack of mention of the obliteration of all those things leads to an inescapable conclusion: they wrote before the destruction happened.

Because the fulfillment did not meet the expectations of present-day interpreters, they contend that Jesus’ plans were thwarted by opposition, that inspired writers were mistaken, and that Jesus will come yet in the future after two millenniums to fulfill his word. In other words, they prefer to deny Jesus’ own words than to admit being misled and mistaken in their interpretations! Are you going to trust the interpretations of men when they claim that Jesus had to change his plans because of opposition and that he and the apostles had to shift from what they had taught about the soon coming of the Lord? Jesus said all those things would be fulfilled in the lifetime of persons listening to him. Modern interpreters say that did not happen! Whom do you believe?

That means, then, that all prophetic messages of Jesus came into fulfillment at that time of his avenging and redeeming Presence – the “*parousia*”. We reach this conclusion, not because we can identify and explain everything prophesied in highly symbolic language but it is because we believe Jesus told the truth. Our trust is in his words rather than in our interpretations that contradict his promises. Yes, all were fulfilled! That includes Revelation which internal evidence indicates was written while the temple and the city were still standing! It makes the fantastic theories and predictions of the soon return of

Christ, the arising of the man of sin, the great tribulation, the rapture, the battle of Armageddon, and a thousand year reign on earth totally incredible.

All those things have long since transpired though, because they did not meet misdirected expectations, their fulfillment has been commonly denied and thrust into the future. In reality, it places more credibility in historians and scholars than in the veracity of Jesus himself. Read the text! Over and over, Jesus and the inspired writers declared that all those things were imminent and would occur in the lifetime of many who heard Jesus' own declarations. Theorists prefer to say Jesus' original plans were thwarted by opposition than to admit that they have erred in understanding! I will let you characterize those teachers in your own words!

It is of interest that the Catholic version of the New Testament published in 1941 offers these possible dates: Matthew – 42-50; Mark 60; Luke – prior to 63; John late in the first century; and Revelation – 96. Concerning Matthew's Gospel, it is explained, "Definitely, however, the Gospel itself, depicting the Holy City with its altar and temple as still existing, and without any reference to the fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy, shows that it was written before the destruction of the city by the Romans (70 A.D.), and this internal evidence confirms the early traditions." In regards to Luke they comment, "This Gospel was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, for it does not refer to the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy. Since the Acts of the Apostles closes its narrative with the year A.D. 63 or 64, the Gospel of St. Luke, his first book, must have been written prior to A.D. 63."

After making these properly convincing points about Matthew and Luke, they abandon the "internal evidence" and date John and Apocalypse (Revelation) toward the end of the century! What kind of scholarship is that? If failure of Matthew and Luke to mention the destruction of their city was proof that they wrote before it happened why would that same evidence not be proof that John wrote both his Gospel and Revelation before A.D. 70? In both the Gospel of John and Revelation it is indicated that both the city and the temple were still intact.

The late date assigned to Revelation has come out of interpretative errors of the historians who could not perceive that Christ had come in fulfillment of his own words in ending the earthly kingdom of Israel. They fail to recognize that the unbelieving Jews rather than the Romans were the original enemies of Christianity. The rebellion was by Jews, not by a falling away of Christians, and Christ's avenging Presence was against the Jews rather than against Rome. Jerusalem, rather than Rome, was the Babylon that had killed the prophets -- including Christ.

This is somewhat repetitive but the message needs to be repeated until hearts are opened to receive it. Belief in the fulfillment of these prophecies is not essential to salvation but it adds surprising meaning to so many generally misunderstood passages. My 48-page overview, "*End-Time Prophecies*" *All Fulfilled*, can help you. \$2.00 postpaid. []

(Cecil Hook: August 2005)

Talkin' Texas: Do you reckon the cowboys chose these names? – Bronco, Lariat, Spur, Ropesville, Muleshoe, Roundup, Bull Run, Hereford, Whiteface, Bovina, Whitehorse, Antelope, White Deer, Deer Park, Buffalo, Buffalo Gap, and Buffalo Springs.